

# Sexual Health Promotion Strategies for International University Students: Recommendations from Students

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Unplanned pregnancies, high rates of terminations, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) amongst international university students in Australia have been identified as a high priority problem by a number of Australian researchers. A review of the literature shows little primary data has been published explaining the causes as well as recommendations for prevention. This research project was developed to fill a gap in the knowledge and also to inform the development of health promotion prevention interventions and support services and Deakin University and other universities in Australia.

Interviews were conducted with 27 students at Deakin University (12 international, 15 domestic). Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to explore experiences of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (second and first-hand experience where possible) and gather recommendations for prevention. This presentation will focus on the second part of the data gathered, which are the specific recommendations for prevention and support programs related to sexual health.

Recommendations for prevention strategies included free or low cost services for international students, free contraception (condoms and birth control), widespread distribution of prevention messages, making students aware of existing services, making students aware of services on and off campus, using libraries and eateries to advertise, having group discussions with food, having a sexual health promotion week, providing information online, making safe sex fun, and addressing sexual identity to make it more acceptable (gay, bisexual, transgender). Providing culturally sensitive information and information and services in languages relevant to the cultures of the students were also recommended.

These findings point to the urgent need for more enhanced sexual health promotion and support programs for international students studying in Australia. The findings also point to similar experiences by domestic and international students in Australian universities related to sexual health risk behaviour (unsafe sexual practices and the experiences of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections). Recommendations are for programs which address both international and domestic students, as well as targeted programs for international students to orient them to the Australian health care system and their access to services based on their insurance coverage.